

FOREWORD BY ANN PETTIFOR

The common good is widely understood as that which is shared and beneficial for the general welfare of a human community. Christian Felber’s *Change Everything: Creating an Economy for the Common Good* – argues persuasively that we must move to a state Aristotle defined as the healthy *oikonomia*, in which money serves as a means for the “good life”, from the unnatural *chrematistike*, in which multiplication of money becomes not just an end in itself, but also the means for exercising dominium over the 99 percent.

Under the capitalist system of *chrematistike*, credit is the main driver of economic expansion (defined by economists as “growth”) and consumption. The establishment, over time of a system of credit creation was a civilizational advance, and is a great public good, because, as Keynes argued, it enables us “to do what we can do”. However, like the magic in Goethe’s “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” it must be managed and regulated. In the hands of financial “apprentices” it can do great harm. The reckless and deregulated proliferation of easy, but costly money, represents a great danger to the common good. Speculators in globalized capital markets, detached from democratic regulation and oversight, have opened the spigot of the “magic” that is easy credit and used it to fuel global economic expansion and the constant impetus to capital accumulation by the already-rich. Consumption, in turn, gorges on fossil fuel extraction, accelerating the growth of greenhouse gas emissions.

Deregulated credit in a world of mobile capital does not just fuel consumption, it also fuels corruption, of both the political and finance sectors. Drug dealers, traffickers and gangsters engage in a global trade that killed roughly 450,000 in 2015; a trade that has made them amongst the wealthiest beneficiaries of today's system of unregulated, globalized, mobile capital.¹

Credit is presumed to “grow” exponentially as private finance fuels capitalism's ability to first, create society's new “wants”, what J.K. Galbraith called our psychologically grounded desires:

...“wants” that do not “originate in the personality of the consumer” but are “contrived by the process of production”.²

Instead, and for the sake of the common good, we should be prioritizing human *needs*—including the need for security at a time of not just climate breakdown, but earth systems breakdown. While survival is the most basic human need, all people require health and autonomy for effective social participation. Autonomy of agency requires mental health, cognitive understanding and opportunities to participate – all essential to the universal *Green New Deal*. Additional needs include: adequate nutritional food and water; protective housing; non-hazardous physical and work environments; security in childhood; significant primary relationships; physical security; economic security; safe birth control and child-bearing; basic education. To optimize these needs, argues Professor Gough,³ societies require freedoms from oppression (civic and political rights); freedoms to (rights of access to need satisfiers) and political participation.

From the perspective of the ecosystem, perhaps the most damaging aspect of globalized, largely deregulated credit-creation is the finance sector's demand for high, real rates of return on a relatively effortless process: the creation of new money. If interest rates are higher than the capacity of the earth, or the economy, to renew itself, then interest

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rates become brutally extractive. Individuals that are obliged by low or falling incomes to borrow, are driven to work long hours to raise the money needed to repay the interest on debt. Firms cut costs and to exploit labour for longer in order to raise the finance needed to service their debts. Governments strip forests, fish seas and exploit the land to improve “efficiency” and generate the returns needed to repay their obligations, including foreign debt service.

Scientists have made clear that earth’s and therefore humanity’s life support systems – soils, aquifers, rainfall, ice, the pattern of winds and currents, pollinators, biological abundance and diversity – are threatened with complete breakdown. In so far as human communities depend for their survival – not just their general welfare – on these life support systems, the common good must now embrace not just humanity, but nature in the widest sense of the word.

This is difficult for Western societies because for two thousand years or more our culture has driven us to exercise “dominion” over nature. As Hugh Welch of the Institute for Faith, Ethics and Economics writes:

In Genesis 1:26-28 God calls mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve, to exercise dominion over the earth, subdue it, and develop its latent potential. We are called to fill the earth with his glory through creating what we commonly call “culture”. The Hebrew word *radah* in this passage carries the idea of ruling, subduing, and exercising dominion.

Justin Holcomb argues that a correct definition of dominion does not mean destruction, but responsibility:

A false view of dominion has played a role in the mistreatment of creation, but a correct understanding of the concept can lead to service, responsibility, and stewardship.

Indeed so, but to transform a culture from dominion to service, responsibility and stewardship to ensure the common good, does mean rolling back and disinterring a deeply entrenched view pervasive in Western societies: that nature is subordinate to human interests and well-being. The very opposite is the case: the very survival of humanity is dependent on the life support systems provided by nature.

So this book is published at a critical time for human civilization. Are we capable of undertaking a radical transformation of public attitudes, but also of our economy and ecosystem – a transformation vital not just to the common good, but to human survival?

I am an optimist and believe that we can – because we have done so before. How was it done? First, we could not imagine a situation being different. Then things changed and we couldn't imagine going back to how they were before.

As an example the Rapid Transition Alliance gives us smoking – promoted by an industry that knew about, but publicly denied, knowledge of the fact that smoking killed millions of people. Largely thanks to the work of scientists, transformation in the face of powerful corporate interests was achieved – and relatively quickly.

The Rapid Transition Alliance reminds us of what happened quite recently, when a volcano – Eijafjallajökull – erupted in the early hours of 14 April, 2010. Within hours airports all over Europe were closing. It was, writes Andrew Simms, as if a giant master switch for the aviation industry had been flicked to “off”. The fine dust thrown up by the volcano was lethal to modern jet engines. For days Europe was grounded. One of the main arteries of the modern world – cheap, ubiquitous air travel – was suddenly cut. It was also a glimpse of a future in which climate breakdown, and limited oil supplies will have clipped the airline industry's wings. The world did not come to a standstill. The sky didn't fall. It revealed how life would be different without airlines: it would go on, as it has done for thousands of years.

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Finally, the arrival of the internet and the speed with which it has brought about an extraordinary transformation in communication and information was not predicted, nor could we have imagined such change was possible in so short a time.

So we know from our own experience that change can happen – fast. Christian Felber is right: we can change everything to create an economy for the common good.

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